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A LETTER

TO THE

KUMI-AI CHURCHES,

PREPARED IN ANTICIPATION OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE JAPAN MISSION OF THE
AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR FOR-
EIGN MISSIONS, NOVEMBER 30TH, 1894.

KYŌTO, JAPAN.

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE JAPAN MISSION of the American Board, held in Kōbe, July 5th—12th, 1894, the following action was taken, viz:—

Whereas, with the current year, the Mission will complete a quarter of a century of missionary effort, therefore,

Resolved, that a committee of five be appointed to prepare a letter to the Kumi-ai Churches, expressive of our deep sense of the divine goodness as shown in these twenty five years of our common history and our grateful appreciation of their earnest labors in behalf of our Master's Kingdom, together with such suggestions regarding future plans of co-öperation as said committee may deem fitting.

The committee appointed under this resolution was composed as follows:—

D. C. GREENE, J. L. ATKINSON, OTIS CARY, J. T. GULICK and G. M. ROWLAND.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE KUMI-AI CHURCHES OF JAPAN.

DEAR BRETHREN IN THE LORD :—

The coming November will mark the close of a quarter of a century of service on the part of our Mission. Our first representatives landed in Yokohama, November 30th, 1869, so that the history of the mission covers all but two years of the Meiji period with all its deep-seated political and social changes. While we recognize the fact that many of the most potent causes of what we may call the Japanese renaissance were working long prior to the downfall of the shōgunate, yet the gradual unfolding of the new life falls almost entirely within this quarter century of our history. We count it no small privilege to have been permitted to observe close at hand, the effect of this new life and to share in so large a degree the aspirations of our Japanese associates. We use the term share advisedly, for we have not been observers merely; our deepest sympathy has been enlisted in behalf of these high hopes.

We will not mention these changes in detail. They have been so constantly in your minds as to render it superfluous to enumerate them. We simply desire to emphasize our conviction that the Lord's hand has been in them all and to record our gratitude to Him for all the good fruit which they have brought forth, as well as for that providence which has placed our lives in such close relations to you and to your beloved country in this momentous period. We devoutly pray, that this same Lord will continue to guide your revered Emperor and his counsellors in days to come and bless this nation, not merely with material prosperity, but also with the richest of those intellectual

and moral gifts to which your statesmen have looked forward and for which they have spent their best strength.

While these thoughts of the past and hopes for the future take a large place in our minds as we look back upon this period of Christian labor, it is natural that we should lay especial stress upon the religious aspects of these twenty-five years. We believe that the Lord whom we serve and in whose hand our breath is, has been manifesting Himself in every department of life—that His Spirit is working every where and at all times, and yet, He has by His providence, put us into the ministry of His Word and made us, unworthy though we feel ourselves to be, His ambassadors to proclaim the blessed Gospel of reconciliation through faith in Jesus Christ. We may properly, then, look to the acceptance of that Gospel and the manifestation of the faith which brings men back to their true relations to God, as the special goal of our prayers and our endeavors.

We claim no large place among the agencies of the divine providence. We recognize the noble part borne by the many Christian workers, both Japanese and foreign, who have stood with us as preachers of the Word. We recognize, too, the numberless streams of influence which, directly and indirectly, have served to open the hearts of men and even to excite faith in the one God and Creator of all. Realizing as we do, the vastness and variety of this volume of influence, we have no inclination to speak of what we have done, but rather of what we have witnessed of the progress of our Master's Kingdom.

When our first missionaries landed, there were in all Japan, aside from the fruit of the seed sown by Xavier and his successors, very few Japanese, probably less than half a score, who claimed the Christian name. The public preaching of the Gospel was not then possible and the work of our mission was begun in the face of many obstacles; but even in those first years, a few were led to accept

Christianity, and the name of Ichikawa Yeinosuke who gave his life for his faith, not to speak of others, will always claim an honored place in the history of Christianity in Japan. In 1874 the Kōbe and Ōsaka churches were organized—the first of the Kumi-ai order. From that year onward the number of believers and of churches rapidly increased until to-day there are nearly a hundred congregations and more than 11,000 Christians connected with that organization, while the total number of Christians in all Japan is nearly 100,000.

It is not, however, to this large number of Christians that we would point as indicative of the position which Christianity has won, but rather to the strong influence which its followers have gained in nearly every department of life; and of this influence, we believe the Kumi-ai Churches may claim their full share.

We have seen in your various churches, men who have manifested a spirit so self-forgetful, so loyal to Christ, so zealous in behalf of the interests of His Kingdom, so full of the best public spirit, as to win our admiration. We have seen them endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ; in the midst of the severest discouragements, we have seen them rejoice in their confidence in the final triumph of that Kingdom which, while it cometh not with observation, embodies the noblest ideals, both for this life and for that which is to come, and moves onward with resistless force. We call to mind Neesima, Sawayama and Yamazaki who after lives of incessant devotion entered the dark valley only to find it lighted by the presence of Him who brought life and immortality to light. These sainted men have left the Church a legacy which will ever be a cherished possession. The spirit which they exemplified has been the spirit of your churches—the spirit which they have sought to represent in their relations to the world and to cultivate in the hearts of those around them. We believe, further, that this spirit has impressed itself to an important

degree upon the life of the nation ; that it has had much to do with the political and legal reforms in which all rejoice ; that it has served even to place before the leaders of Shintō and Buddhist thought higher standards both in religion and morality. We see in this the work of a divine providence among whose beneficent agencies the Kumi-ai Churches have gained a recognized place—they have been in the apostolic phrase, co-workers together with God.

We note, too, your interest in a broad and Christian education to which the many schools, both for young men and young women, established under your auspices, so clearly testify. These institutions have not all been successful ; some of them have been abandoned. Such apparent failures, however, have not, we believe, been owing to any weakening in your desire to see all educational institutions controlled by a Christian spirit, but rather to new and unforeseen conditions which call for somewhat different methods. We dwell with especial pleasure upon the Dōshisha, which, while not in its inception, or even in its later history, in any technical sense, the creation of the Kumi-ai Churches, is yet the outgrowth of the same system of influences and has been almost from the first dependent upon their sympathy and support. In a very true sense, it gives evidence to the world, in the face of much gainsaying, of your belief in the close relation between religion and sound learning.

The progress of science creates many new problems and many new trials to faith, but we believe, and that firmly, that religion and science are mutually dependent ; that true religion, seeking as it does for the fullest knowledge of the mind of God, may rightly demand of science the best and freshest results of its investigation into those laws which are nought but the revelation of the methods and, hence, of the will, of an ever-present God. Because of this faith, we have rejoiced with you in the success of the Dōshisha and allied institutions, though sometimes we have been anxious, perhaps unduly, lest

there be, under the stress of the more exacting conditions of these later years of special progress in scientific education, a letting down of the Christian enthusiasm and evangelistic purpose which were the main springs of Dr. Neesima's activity and which he sought to cultivate as the characteristic spirit of the Dōshisha. We are assured that his successor has assumed his great responsibilities in the same spirit and with a like earnestness of purpose.

We note also the large participation of the Christians in the varied forms of eleemosynary work which in an ever increasing degree is occupying the minds of your countrymen. In this work, too, the Kumi-ai Churches have taken a prominent part. Hospitals, a training school for nurses, dispensaries, orphan asylums, industrial schools and other relief agencies testify to the consciousness of the churches that they must not fail to represent Him who Himself bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows. In all these things we rejoice, because we believe that only the spirit of Christian love which they express can overcome the selfishness which too often darkens the civilization of this nineteenth century. We do not come to you from a land where Christianity exhibits a finished work to offer its society to you as a model for your own—far from it! Even in those lands where its hold is the strongest, the work of Christianity has but begun. It is still struggling with many powerful forces which at times seem fraught with the direst evils. We believe that Christianity, and Christianity alone, can check these forces, or rather transform them into messengers of blessing. In spite of its unfinished work, Christianity has earned the right to be called the glad tidings of great joy. As such we have proclaimed it to you that you might be partakers with us of God's rich grace. As such you have received it and are transmitting it to your countrymen.

We have dwelt at length upon the past and its successes, because our hearts are full of gratitude to the blessed Lord who has led us

hitherto, and we call upon our souls to bless and magnify His most holy name. If in recent years there has been a decline in Christian activity, has it not been owing to a decline of faith in God as a God in close relations to His people—even at their right hand—who has revealed Himself in the face of Jesus Christ? Such a faith must be the source of the Christian life. Some echoes of recent controversies in Japan have awakened, therefore, much anxiety on the part of many of her friends abroad lest a cold philosophy should take the place, among your churches, of a warm and hearty faith in the Son of God.

In an official letter to the Mission recently received, the Rev. N. G. Clark, D. D., the venerable senior Secretary of the American Board, and one of Dr. Neesima's oldest and warmest friends, writes as follows:—

“ While the contributors to our treasury would be very unwilling to have their funds expended for the support of unsound views of Christian doctrine, or for the support of men of doubtful moral and Christian character, we are very far from insisting on any particular form of doctrinal expression, and would allow the largest liberty in formal statement of the essential truths of Christianity relating to the Scriptures as a revelation of the mind and will of God to men, and in regard to the person and work of Christ and of regeneration by the Spirit of God, and of final reward according to character. These points are regarded, I think, by all shades of theological opinion among our constituency as essential truths to be maintained and illustrated and made the ground of our hope of success through the blessing of the Holy Spirit upon our preaching. If we preach any other gospel we cannot look for the divine blessing upon it. * * * * I accept the Scriptures, as intended in the providence of God for the spiritual instruction of all men, of whatever race, or clime, or character, and as so intended by the Holy Spirit in securing such expression of these truths as could readily be apprehended by all men—not for the learned, nor for the ignorant, nor for men of philosophical minds rather than common minds, but for all men—hence as intended for all men. The natural and simple interpretation of the language of Scripture is the true interpretation. * * * * You are dealing with a people who have come out of an entirely different culture, trained to look at moral and religious questions from an

entirely different point of view and who are in need, therefore, of the largest sympathy for every earnest purpose to know and do the will of God—large sympathy with all earnest and honest inquiry, and yet, fidelity to the truth.”

These words were not written for publication, nor with any thought that they would meet your eyes; but we insert them here because they reveal the faith of one whose long life has been spent in Christian service and his interpretation of the faith of those who through us are co-operating with you in evangelistic labors. They will also indicate to you his own great interest, and that of the American Board, in you and in the future which is opening so invitingly before you. We believe that you hold to the same faith.

We have felt great sympathy with the spirit of independence which has manifested itself so strongly among your churches in recent years. In view of all that your people have gained in other fields and your own experience in the administration of the weighty affairs of your religious organizations, it seems every way fitting that you should contemplate the speedy financial independence of the Japanese churches. We would not in the least degree impede this most desirable movement. In our co-operation for many years with the churches, both in local affairs and in the more general work of the Home Missionary Society, which has been a source of great pleasure to us, we have endeavored to stand in such an attitude to your representatives as in no way to restrict the independence of the churches. We believe that our efforts in this regard have met with cordial recognition at your hands. Still, the question arises whether the time has not come for a radical step in the direction of financial independence. We know that some of your number believe that the time has come. While we have no desire to break up the present system for our own sake, we would ask you to consider this matter carefully in the interest of the Kumi-ai Churches. If such a step should be taken, it would seem most appropriate to begin with the general work of the

churches. There were according to the last report upward of forty self-supporting churches of your order, and it would appear fitting that these churches should combine together in a general work which should be entirely their own.

The following thoughts have weight with us in this connection :—

(1). It is probable that such a union in a work exclusively their own would lead to a keener sense of responsibility on the part of the churches and, hence, to a new enthusiasm and to more liberal contributions.

(2). Such financial independence in this general work would lead to simplicity of administration in the Home Missionary Society. The growth of that society has rendered co-operation difficult, because of the distant relations which the representatives of the Mission must sustain to its wide-spread work. In early years the ground covered was relatively small and both Japanese and foreign committees were personally acquainted with the whole field and with all of the evangelists. Such knowledge of details is impossible now that the field extends from Echigo to Hyūga, a distance of nearly 1,000 miles by the ordinary routes of travel. When misunderstanding arises, it is extremely difficult for the members of the foreign committee to visit the locality concerned. There is, therefore, at times a lack of that fulness of information essential to successful co-operation. In the local work, on the other hand, it is less difficult to secure equal information as regards the co-operating parties. If necessary, joint visits can be made to places where embarrassments occur and such personal conferences with the evangelists and others can be secured as constitute a guarantee against serious differences of opinion. The difficulties which have occurred in the past have been chiefly found in the general work and have arisen, as we believe, in large measure because of the more indirect relations to that work which are a necessary result of its extended character.

(3). We believe that such financial independence would promote unity of thought and purpose among the constituents of the Home Missionary Society. There is reason to fear that the continuance of the present relations with the Mission may lead to a lessened interest in the work of that society, on the part of some of the Japanese brethren who have hitherto been among its most ardent supporters. It is not that they feel less responsibility for the evangelistic work, or love it less, but for various reasons they are convinced that the exigencies of the time require singleness of control.

(4). We believe that this step would prepare the way for a larger influence upon your non-Christian countrymen, by helping them to see that, whatever may have been its origin, Christianity has ceased to be a hothouse plant, has become naturalized upon Japanese soil and has sunk its roots deep into that soil. The fact, as Dr. Clark has said, that you and we have grown up and received our education under different systems of culture compels us to look at many questions from different points of view. While we believe firmly in freedom of thought and have had no wish to place artificial barriers in the way of your students, or scholars, as they seek to learn the will of God, revealed in the Scriptures and in their own experience, yet we know that sometimes the conditions which we have felt obliged, explicitly or implicitly, to place upon our offers of aid have seemed to some of you irksome and in some degree, at least, injurious to the life and influence of the churches. Is it not better under such circumstances, that the general work which represents to your people the life and thought of the whole body of Kumi-ai Christians should be so conducted that the desire for financial aid could not appear to any in your churches, or outside of them, to be hindering, or distorting, the growth of your intellectual and spiritual life?

We do not make this suggestion because of any lack of confidence in the truth which we have taught; but because we believe that your

religious life will develop in a more healthy manner if every appearance of outside pressure be removed. We have profound faith in the teaching we have sought to unfold, but we desire to see it accepted not because it is ours, not because it is associated with a system which we represent, nor because of any other adventitious reasons, but rather because it is in harmony with your own study of the Scriptures and with your own mature experience. Freed from the appearance of an extraneous support, we are confident that, while the essential doctrines of Christianity will remain, the form of expression will the sooner be brought into conformity with your own habits of thought and thus be more speedily recognized by your countrymen as the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

We address to you these words of congratulation and suggestion, with a hearty and grateful appreciation of the cordial fellowship which has been extended to us in the past and which we trust will be ours in coming years. We recognize that the work which we began is already yours rather than ours. It is our desire, as we enter upon this new term of evangelistic service, to aid you, so far as we may, in carrying out your plans, and in every way to do what lies in our power for the upbuilding of the Kingdom of our Redeemer. The rapid development of your national life foreshadows new social conditions. How far these may be directly favorable to our common efforts we cannot know; but we believe that, if rightly apprehended, they will, sooner or later, be seen to subserve the interests of the churches. May God grant to us all, wisdom that we may rightly divide His truth and thus meet the requirements of these ever varying conditions, and grant to us also a faith so strong that, in the face of the possible delays and discouragements of these untried scenes, we may endure as seeing Him who is invisible! The victory is sure. It is to be gained, not in Japan, not in America, alone, but in the world. The word has gone forth—the kingdoms of this world shall become the



kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. By faith we already see the glory of this victory.

Praying for the richest prosperity for yourselves and for your churches, we remain in behalf of the Japan Mission of the American Board,

Your brethren in Christ,

(Signed)

{ D. C. GREENE.
J. L. ATKINSON.
OTIS CARY.
J. T. GULICK.
GEO. M. ROWLAND.

KYŌTO, SEPTEMBER 1st, 1894.
